

# SFSDS Newsletter

Spring 2012

## When one door closes another opens...

The last several months have been quite challenging. We completed the floor at the Hollywood Moose Lodge and recently their entire Board of Directors decided to retire, which put the HML into suspension. They had an emergency meeting this past Friday and their District President has been working with their National office to resolve this issue. We have been researching and visiting all types of halls and banquet rooms. We plan to have a decision very soon!

**The SFSDS is having a special dance scheduled for May 5, 2012 at 7:30pm**

**Arthur Murray Studio**  
4710 N. University Drive  
Lauderhill (954) 572-7503

**The studio has a 1800+ dance floor, ample seating and a pleasant atmosphere. We're so excited to be able to partner with Arthur Murray's and offer a dance location in North Lauderdale.**

**Admission ~ Members \$12;  
Non-Members \$17**



## Directions to Arthur Murrays:

**FROM Fort Lauderdale, FL**  
**Driving directions to 4701 North University Drive, Lauderhill, FL 33351**  
**9.6 mi - about 19 mins**

1. Head west on E Broward Blvd/FL-842 W toward N Andrews Ave 6.8 mi
  2. Turn right at FL-817 N/N University Drive
- Destination will be on the right 8.7. mi

**FROM Miami, FL**  
**Driving directions to 4701 North University Drive, Lauderhill, FL 33351**  
**33.8 mi - about 34 mins**

1. Head east on NW 15th St toward NW 18th Ave 0.2 mi
2. Take the 2nd left onto NW 17th Ave 1.4 mi
3. Turn right at NW 36th St 0.8 mi
4. Turn left at NW 10th Ave 0.2 mi
5. Turn right to merge onto I-95 N toward FL-826 7.5 mi



### Heart of the Dancer by Robin Urhig

I wanted to entitle this article "And then we all remembered why we're here!" As I write this, please forgive me, I write it from a Competitors viewpoint. Mine is probably different from someone who attends to have fun and see some good dancing.

As a competitor your day starts at 7:00 a.m. for floor practice, followed by breakfast that you can't eat because you are too nervous, followed by a nap where you can't sleep because you are too nervous, followed by more practice that probably won't go well because you are tired and nervous, followed by a good cry because you are too tired and practice didn't go well, followed by reassurance from your friends that you don't believe because you are too nervous, followed by a long hot shower to relax which doesn't work because now you're trying to dance your routine in the shower. AAAAHHHH!!!!

Do you get the idea that sometimes its not very much fun? It's all work and it's all for three BIG minutes in "the pit." Many times during the weekend I sat back and said, "Why do we do this?" I'm sure every competitor has said this at some point. The applause and trophies and accolades must sustain us. Because it is so much WORK!!

But getting back to "And then we

6. Take exit 12A-12B for FL-826 W/Florida Turnpike/FL-826 E/I-95 N 0.1 mi  
7. Take exit 12 A on the left for Florida Turnpike toward FL-826 W 0.7 mi  
8. Keep left at the fork, follow signs for Turnpike and merge onto Florida's Turnpike/Ronald Reagan Turnpike 19.1 mi  
9. Take exit 62 to merge onto FL-870 W/W Commercial Blvd 3.1 mi  
10. Turn left at NW 76th Ave/N University Dr 0.7 mi  
Destination will be to your right 4701 N University Dr Lauderhill, FL 33351

### FROM West Palm Beach, FL Driving directions to 4701 N University Dr Lauderhill, FL 33351 47.6 mi - about 57 mins

1. Head south on N Dixie Hwy/State Hwy 805 toward 1st St/Banyan Blvd 0.6 mi  
2. Turn right at FL-704 W/Okeechobee Blvd 5.1 mi  
3. Take the Florida's Turnpike S ramp 0.6 mi  
4. Merge onto FL-91 S/Florida's Turnpike 37.2 mi  
5. Take exit 62 to merge onto FL-870 W/W Commercial Blvd 3.4 mi  
6. Turn left at NW 76th Ave/N University Dr 0.7 mi  
Destination will be to your right 4701 N University Dr Lauderhill, FL 33351



### Just Say Yes (maybe...)

Copyrighted Kelly Buckwalter Casanova  
1995, Revised 2004

"Would you like to dance?"

These are the five most common words heard at any swing dance, yet for many people the emotions that come up when they ask this optimistic question are overwhelming. Face it, no one likes to be rejected. I know from personal experience how challenging it can be to deal with the negative responses that can sometimes

remembered why we're here" and the most incredible event of the weekend. Sunday night after all of the competitions were over and the last award had been given out, many of the competitors headed over to the Neon Cactus Bar for some drinking and dancing. It's time to relax! What happened next was a sight to behold.

As people trickled in and the dance floor got more crowded, people started looking for any available space to dance. Before you knew it, there were 100 people packed into this little bar dancing in doorways, between tables, and in every aisle they could find. They tried to close at 1:00 a.m. but everybody protested, making such a racket that management conceded to give us another 20 minutes.

As I watched everybody dancing, I remembered why we were all here! We love to dance! Such a profound thought!! It was such a blast to see the joy on all these competitor's faces now that the work was all over. There were broken hearts and ecstatic souls all in the same place, dancing for the sheer joy of dancing. I would have thought that after an entire weekend of working on dancing, nobody would want to dance another step. WRONG!! It was just the opposite, because all the work was over, nobody could get enough of dancing just for the fun of it!

When the Neon Cactus finally kicked us out, we were determined that all we needed was a boom box and some CD's and we could just break into the Ballroom. Brilliant, HUH? The heart of the dancer! Even though we never made it back into the Ballroom, that still did not stop us. We had music and we had dancers so carpet didn't stop us. People were still dancing at 4:00 a.m.

I am probably more guilty than most at forgetting that all this work started out as fun. But now I have a

follow when asking someone to dance. When I was in high school and college, I was NEVER asked to dance. Since I had the distinct misfortune to have very beautiful friends, whenever a guy approached me I soon discovered that he usually wanted the name or phone number of one of my girlfriends. Consequentially, I soon learned that if I wanted to dance I would have to ask the guys myself. So I did. And most of the time they said, "No." They really did! My mother tells me I was just a late bloomer...

Since a lot of people have told me they are terrified to ask anyone to dance, and they feel like leaving when someone does reject them, I thought that repeating some of the more colorful rejections given me will help folks realize that most of the time a rejection is a reflection on the other person's character, not theirs! As I've become more confident and secure, I've learned to be more amused by people's rudeness rather than to "own" their comments. And, lest anyone think that once someone has been labeled a "good" dancer no one will turn them down or be rude to them, think again. My amusing list of rejections were said to me after I had won two US Open Swing Dance Championships, and I had been judging and teaching for over ten years!

Since I dance (primarily!) with guys, this column on first glance could be misconstrued as a slap to the guys. My position, however, is that rudeness is not gender-biased. I firmly believe that just as many women have said rude things to guys as guys have said to the women maybe even more! So, for the sake of harmony between the sexes, let's assume the following comments are not gender specific.

My question: "Would you like to dance?"  
Nah-I'd rather smoke a cigarette.  
Ask me later.

Only if you can follow.  
No, I haven't seen if you can dance yet.  
Are you any good?  
Only if you are in the next contest, I'm dancing with competitors only.  
I don't dance with people who don't take from my teacher.  
Only if you've been dancing longer than a

renewed appreciation for "The Heart of a Dancer" and the joy that this dance has brought to all of us . . .



### Give Me a Break!

Kelly Buckwalter Casanova

Copyrighted 1997 Revised 2004

During the last couple of years it seems that "hitting the breaks" has become a bit of an obsession with intermediate level swing dancers. The questions I receive from students regarding this topic lead me to believe that many dancers see hitting the breaks as a black or white situation-either you hit them or you don't; either you're a good dancer or you're not. Since life rarely is that simple, I thought I'd share my experience of learning to hit breaks. My personal evolution consisted of many phases, and continues to this day-several years after first penning this article! My hope is that by sharing my own somewhat pathetic journey, others will be encouraged with their own progress in musical interpretation. At the very least I'll settle for smug amusement when readers see how much more sophisticated they are at whatever stage they are at than I was when I first started to dance.

### On a scale of 0 to 10...

#### Zero.

I don't even notice that there are breaks in the music, let alone accents, phrases, and heaven forbid-lyrics. I spend most of the dance counting and trying not to step all over my partner. Although I'm not even sure which beat to start on, I seem to have fun in spite of myself. Ignorance is bliss. Minus One. (Yes I know the scale is 1 to 10, just poking fun at myself!) I've discovered

year.

As long as you don't try to lead.

No, I think \_\_\_\_\_ is going to ask me to dance.

Not now. Come back later and I'll see.

Maybe...are you with anyone?

No, there are too many really good dancers here that I want to dance with.

No, you'll make me look bad.

No, you make me nervous.

How come you are asking me?

I don't dance with locals when I'm at a convention.

Are you sure you want to dance with me?

No, I learned from someone else.

Does this mean you want to sleep with me?

No, not until I've finished my drink/cigarette.

Um, well, uh...ok, I guess so.

Maybe, who do you take from?

Might as well, there is no one good here tonight anyway.

No, I was just about to ask \_\_\_\_\_ to dance.

No thanks, I'm tired and I'm saving myself to dance with the good dancers.

I don't dance with

teachers/students/competitors/judges.

I'd rather dance with \_\_\_\_\_, will you ask her for me?

Only if you'll tell me the name of that woman over there.

Only if you're single.

Maybe, how long have you been dancing?

And last, but not least, my all time favorite, "I don't know." (What the heck does that mean?)

When someone asks you to dance, remember it's only about 3 minutes. No matter how inexperienced a dancer you might be dancing with, I can almost guarantee that the experience will, if you let it, be a positive one. Perhaps the experience will bring a new friend, a work contact, or an opportunity to work on timing or social skills. A dance doesn't always have to be about the dance. So, what can someone say to make a partner feel good about the risk they've taken by asking for a dance?

Here are some of my favorite responses: I'd love to.

Thanks, I was hoping you'd ask me.

Of course!

Sure!

I was just going to ask you!



that there are breaks in the music and they irritate me. I think it is rude of the musicians to stop playing the music because it makes it hard for me to keep track of which count I'm on while I'm attempting to execute (proper choice of word!) a simple push break. The nerve of those pesky musicians!

#### **One.**

I notice that instead of being perturbed by the breaks, other dancers seem to enjoy them. They appear to be "interrupting" their dancing to pause when the music pauses. Although I can't for the life of me figure out how they know when to stop and go, the concept begins to intrigue me. Are we amused yet?

#### **Two.**

A fellow dancer explains breaks to me and how dancers can learn to anticipate their frequency by subtle shifts in the music and lyrics. I actually start to listen to the music and find that I now realize I'm missing breaks only eight beats after they hit. Go me.

#### **Three.**

I discover that the more I listen to the lyrics the easier it is to anticipate the breaks. Although I still can't understand everything being said in the song, I now realize I'm missing the breaks as they happen. Cool.

#### **Four.**

I can now anticipate a break just before it hits. I still have absolutely no clue what to do, so I still miss it, but at least I knew I was going to miss it before I miss it, so hey, that's improvement, and I'll take it.

#### **Five.**

I can feel the break coming farther in advance. Although I still don't have a clue what I'm supposed to do about it, I do something anyway that doesn't really work because it has nothing to do with the music and I get off time. But since I'm eventually able to get back on time and I kinda-sorta hit the break, I'm thrilled.

#### **Six.**

I've learned how to "strike a pose" so I can now hit breaks and look pretty decent. Of course I still can't transition back into dancing so I look like I'm playing a solo game of "red-light, green-light," but at least I feel like I'm in the same sandbox as all the big kids.

#### **Seven.**

I can actually hit a break with a decent pose, and follow it with a body movement or footwork variation to resolve the break and

I'd be delighted.

Yes, thank you very much for asking.

I've been waiting all night to get the nerve to ask you! ...Well, Almost Never When I discovered the swing dance scene, I learned that everyone asks everyone else to dance, and guess what? Having been rejected all those years, I vowed I'd never say no...well, almost never. Over the years I've modified my "never" to allow me off the hook under the following circumstances:

1. The person asking me to dance is under the influence of a reality altering substance to the point of being dangerous.
2. The person asking me to dance has been emotionally, verbally or physically abusive to me in the past.
3. I am tired or ill and have stopped dancing for the night. In that case, I ask them for a raincheck and remember to find them the next time and ask them for a dance.
4. I want to finish watching some incredible dancing. In that case, I say I'd love to after the current song is finished. I also invite my future partner to sit with me and watch the couple I'm captivated with finish their dance.
5. I can't dance the dance they want to dance to the music that is playing. So I ask for the next dance.
6. I've already promised the dance to someone else. So I arrange to find them later.
7. I am on a date with my husband and I want to spend time just with him. In this instance, my husband and I do not go to a swing dance-we go to an out of the wayplace where we don't think we'll see anyone we know. If I do see someone I know and they ask me to dance, I explain that I'm spending time exclusively with my husband, and then I make a point of asking them to dance at the next swing dance.
8. I am in a deep conversation with someone. In this case I explain that I'd love to dance with them as soon as I finish my conversation. In order to keep the person from hovering awkwardly, I ask where I might find them in 20 minutes or so. That also serves as a gentle hint that my friend and I require a little privacy. Usually if I want to have a deep conversation with someone, I position myself with my back to the dance floor, as far away as possible from the dance floor,

"restart" my dancing without getting off time. Of course I hit the same pose every time, and do the same resolution every time, but hey, what do people expect after only four years of lessons?

### **Eight.**

I can feel a break coming in time to set something up that acknowledges the break without feeling like I'm completely interrupting my dancing. I can transition from the break back into the next move, and I usually do something that fits with the music. I no longer repeat the exact same thing every time. Life is good.

### **Nine.**

I can hit breaks even when dancing to songs I'm unfamiliar with. I sometimes choose to ignore a break in the music whenever I feel it's appropriate to do so. (Ever try to hit all the breaks in "I Ain't Drunk, I'm Just Drinking"?). I'm sooo cool I don't have to hit the breaks.

### **Ten.**

While listening for the major breaks in the music I discover that there are "mini" breaks, or accents, in the music that are much more subtle than the major ones I've been trying to hit. I spend a lot of my energy listening for those subtle shifts and adapting my dancing to mesh with the music as a whole rather than just focusing on hitting the major breaks. As a result, I almost always "hit the break" without trying so hard. I rock.

### **One.**

I'm a more experienced dancer now so I switch parts to learn to lead. I find that I'm so busy trying to think about what to do next that I find it impossible to listen to that noise in the background-what is that called? Oh yeah, music. Breaks aren't even in my vocabulary as yet. Only the best, most assertive followers are able to back lead me into hitting a break. I'm now a rank beginner AGAIN. I go back to Step One. I do not pass GO. I do not collect \$200. Oh well, at least I know I'm trainable...

**In summary**, being able to "hit the breaks" does not make or break a dancer.

Although understanding and reflecting the music is important, a lot of other variables go into making someone a good dancer. Social skills, technique, teamwork, choreography, syncopations, body isolations, and all the other skills that make partner dancing simultaneously incredibly satisfying and incredibly frustrating are

and limit my body language to include only the person I'm talking with.

So in conclusion, if someone rudely rejects your offer to dance, feel sorry for them! However skilled they might be as a dancer, they obviously have few social skills and are probably very unhappy with themselves. On the other side of the coin, if you look at each person who invites you to dance as an opportunity for learning more about people, the dance, and yourself, I'm confident you'll have more fun and the rejections you do get won't bother you as much.

## **Progressing Step by Step**

by Kelly Buckwalter Casanova

At a certain stage in developing dance skills, many dancers feel that they are "getting worse" rather than improving. What is actually happening is that the dancers' understanding of the dance has increased to the point to where he or she has become more critically aware of mistakes they were making all along. The following paragraphs chronicle my attempts to become a "good" dancer with my "older but wiser" editorial comments in parenthesis. Hopefully dancers struggling with their own progress will take comfort by reading about my efforts.

When I first started taking West Coast Swing lessons I thought that after about two months I was "really getting good" because I "knew" all the basic steps. (Ignorance is bliss, isn't it?) Then about six months later I really thought I was getting even better because I "knew" all these fancy variations: inside whip, side pass with a tuck and turn, whip with behind the back hand change, etc...(Be nice now, you know you are starting to recognize yourself!) So then I thought, "If I could just learn to spin, well that would make me a great dancer!" (Some people are slower than others...) So I practiced spinning, and eventually I learned to spin.

But then I decided that that perhaps I needed to acquire some additional skills. (Ah-ha! Maybe there was hope for me after all!) I had just discovered syncopations. At this point I decided that syncopations, not patterns, would make me a "good" dancer. (I take it back, there wasn't any hope...) And that being the case, I actually didn't know much at all about West Coast Swing. (Surprise!) So I spent the next year acquiring more and more footwork, but still I didn't feel complete. (Du-uh!) Then, when I wasn't sure where to go next for improvement, I was offered a teaching position. "Oh, so learning both the lead and follow and teaching will make me a better dancer". (Couldn't hurt!) So I took the job and figured I had finally reached "good" dancer status because I now "knew" both parts and was a teacher. (Wrong!) But once again reality hit, and I realized I didn't feel like a really "good" dancer.

important too. If you can see an improvement in any area, no matter how small, celebrate it! Dancers will always set new goals and challenges, but as we achieve success in even just one area, our ability to enjoy dance will increase dramatically in other areas as well. If anyone reading this feels inadequate or discouraged because they feel they will never get to the level they want, just remember to take it one step at a time. The most important thing is to enjoy yourself, your partners, and the music. Focusing on that, we can't but help improve our skills. So keep it positive, keep it fun!

### Step ?

In 1997 when I first wrote this article I ended it at this point. Since then, I've realized that with regards to breaks what I really admire in great swing dancers is their ability to simply acknowledge a break without having to "go outside the dance" to do so. In other words, instead of "interrupting" their dance to pose and follow up with freestyle, many swing dancers today are able to maintain the integrity of their swing pattern (walk, walk, triple, triple for example) while dancing through the break. The way in which they do so demonstrates that they hear the break, and acknowledge it, but are able to continue to "swing" instead of go for the pose + freestyle method. I love dancing with these folks as they are constantly teaching me new ways to hear the music. In the past I thought some of these characters just didn't hear the break at all. I guess that would have put me back at level Minus Two? J



So then I figured if I competed and won a local Jack & Jill contest then I'd really be a "good" dancer. (I take it back, there was no hope for me after all...) So after chasing a trophy and finally winning one I was elated...for about ten minutes. I had achieved my goal, I was "good", except I didn't feel all that good. (At last a ray of light at the end of the tunnel!) So why didn't I feel good? Well, I decided I needed to win a bigger dance contest - maybe one in which I even did a routine with lifts and aerals and could perform on TV. (That ray of light at the end of the tunnel was on oncoming freight train...)

While continuing to compete at a national level (and on TV and with lifts and aerals...), I discovered body isolations. (Have pity!) So that's what makes a good dancer, I thought. Ok, I'll learn body isolations, and then I'll be a good dancer. (Does anyone see a pattern here?) So then after deciding that body movement was where it was all at I spent another year just learning to do a ripple. (Yeah, so I'm really slow...) A year or so later I discovered something called "the music". (Ok, I'm really, REALLY slow.) Now I decided that hitting the breaks and dancing with a "feel" for the music was what would make me a "good" dancer. (Well, at least I was getting warmer!) So once again I felt like a beginner and realized that I really didn't know much at all. (Finally, some true enlightenment!) I felt I had really missed the boat on the dance all these years, but, "Oh well, might as well get started on listening to the music today so I can someday be a decent dancer". (Notice my goals becoming slightly more humble?) So I worked on understanding and "feeling" the music.

At about this time I realized that in spite of all the "stuff" that I "knew" I wasn't dancing half as well as I thought; I saw myself on video. (Good thing there are 24 hour crisis lines!) I was demoralized. I didn't really "know" anything at all! How could I ever hope to show my face at a dance again with all my many flaws?

What business did I have calling myself a dancer, let alone an instructor? After wallowing in self-pity for a few days I decided to go back to square one and work on my basic technique. (Well, that's a good place to start.) I realized that there was more than one way to do a basic whip. (Go ahead, laugh all you want-you know you see yourself in here somewhere!) Then about a year or so later I discovered my partner - you know the person you hold hands with while you are showing the world all your "stuff" and expressing your inner soul to the music. Anyway, now I decided that actually connecting with a partner was what might make me a tolerable dancer. And then a year later I decided learning other swing dances would help my dancing improve, and then after that it was learning to judge would help my dancing improve, and then a couple years later it was hosting a three day competition, and so on and so on. My process of self improvement so far has taken me over 25 years, and continues to be a work in progress.

The point of all of this is that the more I learn





**All Items listed are prepared by the Board of the SFSDS.**

Accuracy and completeness are not guaranteed. Please confirm date, time and location before attending any event. Dances conflicting with a SFSDS event, may not be listed on our public forum or calendar. Need more? Go online to:  
[havetodance.com/dancefl.html](http://havetodance.com/dancefl.html)

Want to publicize your class, dance or event? Contact  
[sfsdsDance@aol.com](mailto:sfsdsDance@aol.com)

about the dance the more I realize I don't know all that much and that there is a lot more for me to work on and learn. So what do I think makes a "good" dancer now? Everything. Technique, timing, connection, musical interpretation, creativity, rhythm, patterns, syncopations, intelligent choreography, body isolations, balance, control, comic timing, social and competitive skills, charisma, emotional projection, having fun (Remember that?), attitude, confidence, self esteem and all the other qualities I haven't discovered just yet. These are the qualities that I think make a "good" dancer. What makes a great dancer? All that plus soul. So, now I'm also working on my soul! The process for me so far has been both incredibly exhilarating as well as humbling. I'm humbled all the time by the talent around me, and sometime I think I'll never feel as confident and as "good" as I felt after four weeks of beginning classes.

But that's OK. It's OK because I know that, in reality, I'm a better dancer today than I was yesterday. And, if I keep working at it, I just might be a better dancer tomorrow than I am today. So for all those of you who might be feeling discouraged because you think you are getting worse. Take heart! You are just awakening to a new level of awareness that opens doors to more learning opportunities. One thing that I wish I would have known at the beginning is that as satisfying as it is to reach a goal, the process of reaching the goal can be fun and satisfying in itself. So I am now learning to enjoy learning. I am now happy rather than discouraged to discover what I don't yet know about the dance. The opportunity to acquire more knowledge and more skills motivates me. With all the talent in our community I'm positive I will never lack for sources of inspiration.





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